

Comstock Block  
265-277 South Main Street  
Providence  
Providence County  
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-228

HABS  
RI,  
4-PROV,  
128-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. RI-228

## COMSTOCK BLOCK

HABS  
RI,  
4-PROV,  
128-

Address: 265-277 South Main Street, on the west side of  
South Main Street between Gold and Silver Streets,  
Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island.  
Plat 16, Lots 505, 506, 160

Present Owners: 265 South Main Street - Isidor Shechtman  
267 South Main Street - Milton Goldberger  
269-277 South Main Street - Bertha Goldberger,  
wife of Samuel

Present Occupant: Hope Plumbing Supply Company.

Present Use: Store building.

Brief Statement  
of Significance: This building is an example of a small block of  
large row houses built about 1810.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

## 1. Original and subsequent owners:

- a. 265 South Main Street, Plat 16, Lot 505
- 1810 Jeremiah Olney, for and as guardian of Joseph Cooke, sells for \$145.45-1/2 to Joseph Comstock his 1/11 part of a certain lot of land bounded: E by Water Street 44'; S by Jesse Comstock 129'; W by Jesse and Joseph Comstock 44'; N by 12' gangway that separates it from the large Brick Store of John Iness Clarke. - Deed Book 33, page 28, in Providence City Hall.
- 1810 Joseph Sheldon Cooke, merchant sells his 1/11 part of the above property to Joseph Comstock for \$145. - Deed Book 34, page 111, in Providence City Hall.
- 1810 Jeremiah Olney and wife (daughter and devisee of Governor Nicholas Cooke) sell for \$1309 to Joseph Comstock her 9/11 part of the above property being the same whereon the Mansion House of the late Governor Cooke stood which has been consumed by fire. - Deed Book 33, page 127, in Providence City Hall.

1817 Jesse Comstock, mariner, quit claims to Joseph and William Comstock a 11'x44' strip of land bounded: E by Joseph Comstock 44' and N 11' by a gangway. - Deed Book 39, page 474, in Providence City Hall.

(In 1817 Lot #505 was owned by Joseph Comstock and in 1824 its boundaries show William, Joseph's brother as owner, though there seems to be no records of transfer. Joseph died without issue).

1873 WILL: William Comstock..."to my son Richard W Comstock, to my daughter Mary W Almy, and to my daughter Harriet Sprague, each one equal 1/3 part of my house and lot where I now live on South Main Street measuring 22' and extending back 86". - Wills Book 24, page 245, in Providence City Hall.

1887 Property was taxed to Richard W Comstock.

1909 Property was taxed to R W Comstock Land Company.

1920 R W Comstock Land Company sells to William Wexler a certain lot of land bounded: E by South Main Street 22.06'; S by Harry Kaminsky 83.745'; W by R W Comstock and Caroline H Bowen 22.065'; N by Gold Street 84.61'. - Deed Book 592, page 413, in Providence City Hall.

1924 Property was taxed to Jacob Locke and to the following persons in the year designated:

1930 Rose Wexler  
1932 Park Realty Co  
1937 George S Baker  
1938 Betsey T Keene  
1941 Jean Carbone  
1946 Isidor Shechtman

b. 267 South Main Street, Plat 16, Lot 506

1783 INDENTURE: Joseph Cooke et al, of the first part and Hannah Cooke, widow of Nicholas of the second part..to Hannah Cooke her 1/3 part Dower...also 1/2 of a certain lot of land together with 1/2 of the Dwelling House thereon standing, being the late Mansion House of the said Nicholas Cooke, dec. and 1/2 of the appertanances thereto belonging viz: containing all the upright part of the house and all buildings standing on the gangway on the N side of the Estate...to have and to hold for her natural life. Bounded: E by Lower Street 44'; N by

gangway 139'; W by the E boundary of a Store 44'.  
Deed Book 22, page 421, in Providence City Hall.

- 1810 Jeremiah Olney, for and as guardian of Joseph Cooke, sells for \$145.45-1/2 to Joseph Comstock his 1/11 part of a certain lot of land bounded: E by Water Street 44'; S by Jesse Comstock 129'; W by Jesse and Joseph Comstock 44'; N by 12' gangway that separates it from the large Brick Store of John I Clarke. - Deed Book 33, page 128, in Providence City Hall.
- 1810 Joseph Sheldon Cooke, merchant, sells his 1/11 part of the above property to Joseph Comstock for \$145. Deed Book 34, page 111, in Providence City Hall.
- 1810 Jeremiah Olney and wife (daughter and devisee of Governor Nicholas Cooke) sell for \$1309 to Joseph Comstock her 9/11 part of the above property being the same whereon the Mansion House of the late Governor Cooke stood which has been consumed by fire. - Deed Book 33, page 127, in Providence City Hall.
- 1817 Jesse Comstock, mariner, quit claims to Joseph and William Comstock a 11'x44' strip of land bounded: E by Joseph Comstock 44' and N 11' by a gangway. Deed Book 39, page 474, in Providence City Hall.
- 1818 Joseph Comstock sells for \$940 to William Comstock a certain lot of land in the S/ly part of Providence, beginning 21-1/2' N of the lot belonging to Jesse Comstock, where his house stands, thence 21-1/2' S on S Main Street to said Jesse's lot and 1/2 the Wall of the N end of Jesse's house standing on lot hereby conveyed, thence S 6" being 1/2 the thickness of the said Wall..bounding S on said Jesse's lot about 88'; W by strip of land 22', thence E to first mentioned corner. - Deed Book 42, page 91, in Providence City Hall...."and I do further agree that the S wall of the building which may be erected by the said William on the dividing line between him and me, shall be 1/2 on my land and 1/2 on his and I shall be at the 1/2 expense of erecting said dividing Wall..with well privileges."
- 1826 POLICY RECORD: Samuel Eddy..W side South Main Street.. brick and stone..22' front..40' front to back..3 stories in front and 4 in rear..being a middle part of "Comstock Block"..occupied as Dwelling House. Mss fire insurance records of the Providence

Mutual Insurance Company at the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island, Vol. 4, policy #3228.

- 1832 Samuel Eddy sells for \$3000 to William Comstock, mariner, a lot of land with DWELLING HOUSE and other buildings thereon standing. Bounded E by South Main Street 22'; S by Jesse Comstock 85'; W by William Comstock 22'; N by William Comstock... it being the same I purchased of William Comstock in 1824. - Deed Book 60, page 479, in Providence City Hall.
- 1873 WILLS: William Comstock..."....also I give and devise to Anna L Balch my daughter, the DWELLING HOUSE and lot on the W/ly side of South Main Street where she now lives, being the estate I purchased of Samuel Eddy in 1832. - Wills Book 24, page 245, in Providence City Hall.
- 1874 Property taxed to Anna L Balch.
- 1904 Anna L Balch et al sells to John O'Connor a certain lot of land with a Brick building on the W/ly side of South Main Street between Gold and Silver Streets bounded: E by South Main Street 21-1/2'; S by Charles H Atwood 85'; W by Richard W Comstock 22'; N by Richard Comstock 85'. - Deed Book 459, page 386, in Providence City Hall.
- 1904 John O'Connor sells the above property to Mary Connors wife of Bernard...the property was taxed to the following persons in the year designated:
- 1904 Mary Connors wife of Bernard  
1910 Mayer Levitt and wife Lena  
1920 Harry Kaminsky and wife Fannie  
1921 Rose Wexler  
1932 Park Realty Company  
1937 Annie M Livsey  
1938 Milton Goldberger
- c. 269-277 South Main Street, Flat 16, Lot 160.
- 1783 Paul Allen, merchant, et al sell to Joseph Cooke, mariner, executor of the estate of Nicholas Cooke, 1/2 of a certain lot of land in the S/ly part of Town on the W side of the Lower Street. Bounded: N/ly by a 12' gagway and running down into the Salt Water to the Channel of the River, together with 1/2 Dwelling House thereon standing, being the Mansion or Dwelling House of Nicholas Cooke, deceased. - Deed Book 19, page 419, in Providence

City Hall.

- 1786 Joseph Cooke, mariner, sells for 1200 £ lawful Money in good silver to Messrs John I Clarke and Joseph Nightingale, merchants in equal moiety.. 1/2 of a certain piece of land together with 1/2 of the Dwelling House thereon standing, being the late Mansion House of Nicholas Cooke Esq, dec. and 1/2 of other buildings and appertanances thereon standing, being the same as quit claimed to grantor by Paul Allen et al in 1783...bounded W the Channel 86'; N by a 12' gawnway; E by the Lower Street 86'...Deed Book 21, page 328, in Providence City Hall.
- 1809 Oliver Kane and Ephriam Bowen, executors u/w John I Clark, sell for \$4,285.90 to Jesse Comstock, merchant the above property..Deed Book 34, page 54, in Providence City Hall.
- 1811 INDENTURE: Jesse Comstock having erected a BRICK HOUSE on the lot he purchased of Oliver Kane and Ephriam Bowen jr u/w John I Clark in 1809 and hath placed a Brick Wall above the foundation of the N end of said house one foot on the land of Joseph Comstock which he purchased of Jeremiah Olney and Joseph S Cook in 1810...Now this Indenture of 1811...that said Joseph releases to Jesse 6" of the land on which said N Brick Wall stands, the whole length thereof is est..6" in width and 41' back and next adjoining said Jesse's Lott. In CONSIDERATION THE SAID Jesse has released to Joseph all the Wall of the N end of said house, both brick and stone which stands on the land of said Joseph not hereby conveyed to the said Jesse,... and it is further covenanted between said parties that the said Joseph shall be permitted to join to the said wall any buildings he may think proper, providing neither party shall take down or do ought to the injury of the said Wall without the consent of the other party. - Deed Book 45, page 380, in Providence City Hall.
- 1824 Ann Comstock lived here. - Providence Directory.
- 1829 POLICY RECORD: Ann Comstock, widow of Jesse..W side of South Main Street Brick..38' front and 40' front to back..3 stories high in front and four in rear..occupied as a Dwelling House. - Mss fire insurance records of the Providence Mutual Insurance Company at the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island, Vol. 7, policy #4031.

- 1844 William, Jesse, Jeremiah, Benjamin, and Joseph Comstock quit claim to Ann Comstock for her natural life a certain lot of land together with the Brick DWELLING HOUSE and other buildings.. "being all the land grantors inherited from their father Jesse Comstock."- Deed Book 105, page 20, in Providence City Hall.
- 1854 Property is taxed to the heirs of Jesse Comstock.
- 1862 Property is taxed to William, Joseph J & Maria L (wf Joseph J) Comstock
- 1870 William Comstock et al, as guardians, sell for \$9150 to Orrin A Read that lot of land with the Brick Dwelling House and all other improvements.. bounded: E by South Main Street 42'; S by a 13' gangway 80' 10"; W by formerly Jesse Comstock 42'; N by William Comstock 82' 5-1/2". - Deed Book 190, page 432, in Providence City Hall.
- 1884 Property was taxed to John R Read and to the following persons in the year designated:
- 1902 Charles H Atwood
- 1905 Charles H Atwood Estate
- 1906 Bertha Goldberger wife of Samuel
2. Date of erection: c. 1810
3. Notes on alterations and additions: From the deeds and insurance records, the Comstock Block was apparently originally built as a row of three houses. The first floors have since been converted to commercial uses with later store fronts, and the upper floors, at one time divided into apartments, are now unused.

Prepared by Antoinette F. Downing and Elvira Gowdey  
for the Providence Preservation Society  
May 1962.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This building is a block of three row houses, built about 1810. The ground floor of the building has been completely altered, but the mass of the building preserves its original form, and

original details survive on the upper floors.

2. Condition of fabric: Poor.

#### B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: 82' wide x 40' deep, facing east, three-and-a-half stories, on sloping lot with cellar at ground level in rear. Later two-story rear wing. Block divided with party walls into three units, 22' (three bays), 22' (three bays), and 38' (five bays).
2. Foundations: Granite.
3. Wall construction: Brick, common bond, brick 1-3/4" x 3-1/2" x 7". Narrow mortar joints. Later store fronts on first floor.
4. Porches, stoops, etc.: Later wood porch on south side, two stories, with stairway to second floor.
5. Chimneys: Eight brick chimneys, in end walls or party walls.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Two doorways, apparently original, on east front, tops with semicircular stone lintels, later doors.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Double hung wood windows, some six light sash remain, brownstone sills and splayed lintels. Shutter hardware but no shutters.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Gable roof, shingled.
  - b. Cornice: Simple molded wood cornice.
  - c. Dormers: Low, wide shed roof dormers.

#### C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: First floor remodeled shops, apartments on upper floors, in poor condition and mostly unoccupied. Rooms open off central hallway running north - south.
2. Stairways: Some original stairways in place in upper floors. U-shape with winders, enclosed.



3. Flooring: Wood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster.
5. Doors and doorways: Panel doors from various periods; complex molded architraves at small scale appear early; later pilaster tris on some doorways; some with corner blocks.
6. Hardware: Miscellaneous later hardware.
7. Heating: Central heating on first floor. Fireplaces in upper rooms, one-story wood mantels, in principal rooms with colonettes and carved entablature panels.
8. Lighting: Electric.
9. Site: Faces east, front and sides on sidewalk line, small yard in rear; in a run-down commercial area.

Prepared by Osmund R. Overby, Architect  
National Park Service  
April 1962.